

*Interviewer:* Good morning. What is your name?

*Martin Fischer:* Martin Fischer.

*Interviewer:* What made you want to start fishing?

*Martin Fischer:* Well, that's kind of a long story, but I grew up in Chicago, and my mom and dad used to take me for walks behind the Museum of Science and Industry, and there's a series of lagoons there, and there is these little hobbit bridges that connect the little islands and what have you, and we were walking over one, and I was three years old, and there was a huge person, woman, fishing, sitting on the bank, and she was kind of singing gospel music, and there was a fish next to her that, in my three-year-old eyes, sort of like was pulsing orange light, and that was it for me. That's all I've been doing ever since, pretty much.

*Interviewer:* What fish do you catch most often?

*Martin Fischer:* Grouper and snapper on my offshore boats, and I take my little twenty-footer out for Spanish mackerel, pompano, and kingfish.

*Interviewer:* Where do you like to fish?

*Martin Fischer:* Inshore and offshore and lakes, everywhere.

*Interviewer:* Do you have a family, and do you go fishing with them?

*Martin Fischer:* I take my son, and he loves to fish. Not as much as I do, but we fish a lot, and we fish on vacations, and sometimes he goes -- We went out on the Florida Fisherman with Dylan Hubbard and those guys, and we went on the grunt hunt, and it was a lot of fun.

*Interviewer:* What was your best fishing experience?

*Martin Fischer:* Ever?

*Interviewer:* Yes.

*Martin Fischer:* On my birthday in 1985, I caught 422 head of gag grouper on one stop, hook-and-line.

*Interviewer:* What do you enjoy most about fishing?

*Martin Fischer:* The combination of the spiritual and physical aspects of it, and being out on the water and being your own -- You're at the direction of nature, but you're also have a deep influence on your own experience and how successful you are, and so it really allows you -- It's like the last frontier. There are hardly any frontiers left in this world, and fishing seems to remain one of them.

*Interviewer:* Do you usually keep what you catch and eat it, or do you let it go?

*Martin Fischer:* It depends on what I'm fishing for. I'm a commercial fisherman by trade, and so that's kind of where I'm oriented, and so one of the nice things about being a commercial fisherman is you can get to pay for your recreation. Meaning, if I go catch 300 or 400 pounds of Spanish mackerel, I've just had an experience that many people don't have, because it's a fish every cast, when it's right, and I'm having a lot of fun, but I'm making money too, and making money for my crew member.

*Interviewer:* Do you travel all over the place for fishing, or do you stay local?

*Martin Fischer:* I stay local for commercial. I mean, sometimes I might go to the east coast, or I might go to Louisiana. I haven't done that yet, but it's a possibility in the future for kingfish or Spanish.

*Interviewer:* How long are usually your trips offshore?

*Martin Fischer:* The offshore trips are eight to twelve days, sometimes fifteen, and that's what I did as a younger man for a living. I would go to sea on the Rising Sun and try to fill the boat up with grouper and snapper.

*Interviewer:* When you go on those long trips, do you go by yourself or with friends or family?

*Martin Fischer:* You usually take somebody who is working with you, for you, and sometimes that happens to be a friend, or it could be a family member, and, yes, I have gone alone, but that's a very dangerous thing to do.

*Interviewer:* What is the best time of year that you usually fish, catch the

most fish?

*Martin Fischer:* With grouper, usually from January to May is one of the better times for production, as well as the price, and then it sort of slows down through the summer, although red grouper, on the inshore waters, really take off when they are in abundance, and then again in the fall.

*Interviewer:* What is the usual bait that you use?

*Martin Fischer:* We use frozen or fresh-caught sardines, squid, and mackerel.

*Interviewer:* What is the craziest thing that has ever happened on one of your trips?

*Martin Fischer:* I caught a gray white shark by his tail, three miles off of Jacksonville Beach, and he was dead. He was thirteen-and-a-half feet long, and it made CNN. My mother's cousin from Lithuania say it on CNN, and somehow that filtered back through the family, and so that was kind of crazy.

*Interviewer:* Yes, that's cool.

*Martin Fischer:* Yes, it was pretty cool.

*Interviewer:* What are the best seasons to go fishing?

*Martin Fischer:* Again, January to May and October through the end of the year.

*Interviewer:* Are any of your relatives fishermen?

*Martin Fischer:* No. I have the last name of Fischer, but I personally believe that's because they raised martens and fishers in the motherland, where all my family is from, Mother Russia, for fur, and so I believe, or it's my fantasy, that that's where the name came from.

*Interviewer:* What steps do you take to ensure your safety during your fishing?

*Martin Fischer:* I have all the proper safety equipment, of course, and common sense, and preparation. If you are going offshore a hundred miles, or 150 miles, from land, you really need to think about what you're doing, because, even though the

Coast Guard is available, they're not going to be there in ten minutes, and ten minutes could be your life or not, and so preparation.

*Interviewer:* Do you prefer to fish in fresh or saltwater?

*Martin Fischer:* I think I prefer to fish in saltwater. The fish are more -- They are more robust and more plentiful.

*Interviewer:* Do you have different places for fishing here, like in Tampa, different spots?

*Martin Fischer:* Yes, all of us have different spots. I mean, you go to that part of the bay on a certain tide, and you go on the beach at a certain tide for certain fish, and different fish like different tides and different parts of the bay, depending on what the forage is doing, the food, the baitfish.

*Interviewer:* Do you work or fish on Sunday?

*Martin Fischer:* Yes.

*Interviewer:* What are the most commonly-caught fish in Florida?

*Martin Fischer:* The most commonly-caught fish? Recreationally or commercially?

*Interviewer:* Commercially.

*Martin Fischer:* Mullet is probably the most common, and then grouper and snapper and seatrout and sheepshead and pompano.

*Interviewer:* Do you like growing up or living in Tampa Bay?

*Martin Fischer:* Very much. I came here to go to college, at Eckerd, actually, to be a marine biologist, and I did not become a marine biologist, but I became a commercial fisherman.

*Interviewer:* Where did you go to school and for how long?

*Martin Fischer:* At Eckerd, and I graduated from there with a degree in creative writing.

*Interviewer:* What is the most dangerous catch that you have ever caught, except for the shark that you already told us about?

*Martin Fischer:* I used to target sharks, and putting six to eight-foot live animals with those kinds of teeth and the power of their bodies on the boat alive is a dangerous time to be on the boat.

*Interviewer:* How do you prepare for things like that? What are the specific equipment and things that you have to have to actually do those kinds of things?

*Martin Fischer:* Just certain knives for butchering and killing the sharks, and common sense, again. You know, you don't want to put your hand where it doesn't belong or too close to the snapping animal. There is different techniques of bringing the fish onboard and then how you deal with them and how you dispatch them, or kill them, before you cut them up. It's pretty gruesome.

Shark fishing is like being pretty much in a slaughterhouse, because the animals are huge, and their livers are this long, and there is a lot of blood and a lot of gore and a lot of just raw -- You know you're killing something when you kill a shark.

When you kill a grouper, you slit them open, and you pull out that much guts. When you kill a shark, you cut his head off. Well, we used to. Nowadays, you can't do that anymore. The law has changed, but, back in the day, when I did it, you cut their heads off, and we called them logs, because what you would up with was -- Depending on the size of the animal, anywhere from a three-foot to an eight-foot log, meaning all the fins are off and the tail is off and the head is off, and you cut away the belly flap, because the dealers didn't want the belly flap. It's not really good to eat, and so, essentially, you have a butchered fish, whereas, with grouper, it's always landed intact, and you have the guts out, but you can almost not even tell that that's been removed, but shark fishing is really different.

*Interviewer:* You said you took twelve to fifteen-day trips. How do you prepare for trips like that? Like what specifically do you have to do? What is the planning course, and can you explain that to me?

*Martin Fischer:* Well, you have to have a really good list for food and all the attendant things you need, and you have to make sure that you have your prescriptions, if you need any, that you

have enough fuel, bait, ice. You have to have the experience of either doing it before or thinking about it very well, so that you gather up all those things, and then you put them on the boat and you go.

*Interviewer:* Has there ever been a freak accident on one of these trips?

*Martin Fischer:* No, thank goodness. That has never happened.

*Interviewer:* With the way technology is today and how our world is changing and evolving, do you think fishing back in the day is the same as fishing is in the modern era of today?

*Martin Fischer:* Not at all. When I first started grouper fishing, we had Loran-A, and Loran-C hadn't come out yet, and, with Loran-A, you actually had an oscilloscope on your boat, and you would have to manipulate -- It had five dials, I think it was, and it would be like 1, 3, 10 on each dial, and so you would dial the wave form to where it matched -- In other words, wherever you were, there was a wave that was represented on the screen, and you had to match the oscillation to that wave form.

Then, once you did that, it was all -- It was by dial, and then it would represent a number, and then you would apply that to the chart, but it was only -- Repeatability was on only a half-mile. With today's WAAS and GPS, it's three meters, and so that really changed, and that happened in -- I think Loran-C became fairly commercially available in 1980 or 1981, and that totally changed how we fished and who fished and how well they fished, and so there were a lot more grouper back in the day than there are now, in terms of abundance in the water.

*Interviewer:* When you broke into the business, did you expect to be in the position that you are in today?

*Martin Fischer:* Absolutely not.

*Interviewer:* I would like to ask the question of where you connected to any part of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill?

*Martin Fischer:* Well, certainly, because certain parts of the Gulf were closed down when it happened, and I personally believe that our government made some really egregious errors in the way they handled the spill. In other words, that was a

deep well, 5,000-feet below the surface of the water, the seabed, and Jane Lubchenco and her team allowed Corexit, which is a dispersant, to be applied at the well head, so that the public would not see how much oil was really coming out.

What that did was it took the crude oil and dispersed it at 5,000 feet down and spread it like a blanket over the site where the disaster happened, and there are many scientists that believe that 75 percent of the oil that came out of the seafloor is still on the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico or suspended in the water column, because of the Corexit.

*Interviewer:*

If you would have to say, how much damage do you think the oil spill caused to necessarily your line of work?

*Martin Fischer:*

Well, to the seafood industry, it still could have far-reaching effects, and that's my fear. My fear is that one summer of really bad hurricanes and a lot of that oil is going to be pulsed up off the ocean floor, and we're going to see it again.

We weren't directly affected by the oil, or we haven't yet been, but places like Louisiana and Alabama and Mississippi and parts of Texas were covered in oil, and there is some fear, or concern, about genetic anomalies, especially with tuna and red snapper, from the ongoing presence of the hydrocarbons in the water affecting larvae, especially pelagic larvae, like kingfish and tuna, where, when they spawn, they express their eggs into the Gulf Stream or whatever other currents that they're utilizing for nutrients for the eggs.

Well, if that interacts with one of these plumes of submerged oil, there have been problems with those year classes, and so I think that -- I don't think the pudding is out of the oven yet. I think we still are going to see effects of that in the future.

*Interviewer:*

If I may ask, some of those effects, what does that entail? Is that meaning the fish will genetically be different and like they will mutate to something?

*Martin Fischer:*

Well, they have sores, and they don't reproduce, and pretty much they become infertile, is what the biggest finding is, and so then you lose -- Are you familiar with year classes

of fish and what that means, in terms of recruitment and the future of the fishery?

*Interviewer:* Not necessarily.

*Martin Fischer:* Every year, the fish spawn and create eggs, and then they get fertilized and create larvae, and then they go grow up into little fish, and it's like a generation, and so, every year, you expect a certain amount of those recruits to survive and repopulate the ecosystem, and there is a deep concern about what's happening with certain species of fish and their interaction with the Deepwater Horizon event.

*Interviewer:* What is the difference between longline fishing and regular fishing?

*Martin Fischer:* Regular fishing can be a lot of different things, but the longlining is you've got a huge, monster hydraulic reel on your boat, and anywhere up to -- The regulations have changed, and you used to be able to have unlimited hooks. Now grouper and snapper fishermen in the eastern Gulf are only allowed I think it's 750 or 850 hooks to be deployed into the water.

Back in the day, Lauralee Thompson -- Her dad had Thompson Trawlers, and she was an amazing fisherwoman, and she filled up her sixty-five-foot Thompson trawler longlining for yellowedge, to the extent that she had to back it through Johns Pass, because the bow was so down that she didn't have any steering on the tide, and so she actually had to back that sixty-five footer through the bridge, and this was back in 1981 or 1982.

With longlining, you've got more crew, because you've got to bait all those hooks, and you have to unbait all the hooks, and you have to take all the fish off, or whatever else comes up on the line, and it's a different way of fishing.

The way that we do it, we anchor the boat over specific spots and fish vertically, and so what regular fishing means, in the grouper world, is vertical deployment of the gear, and longlining is horizontal deployment of the gear on the bottom.

*Interviewer:* You said that you can only release a certain amount of hooks into the water. Is that per trip or --

*Martin Fischer:* No, that's per line, per set. It's called a set, and so per set. They are allowed I think it's 750 in the water, and prior to - - I can't remember what year that happened, and I think it was 2009. Prior to that, you had an unlimited amount of hooks that you could put down, and it was -- Part of the reason that regulation came about was to protect turtles, to decrease turtle interaction, and, in fact, I think that was the main impetus for it.

*Interviewer:* This is back to the oil spill. Was Deepwater Horizon the worst oil spill you have ever experienced?

*Martin Fischer:* Certainly for me, yes. Exxon Valdez happened up in Prince William Sound in Alaska, and they still haven't recovered from that. There is still oil on beaches there and in the sands and the rocks that still have a negative effect on sea life up there, but, yes, certainly in the Gulf of Mexico, that is the worst thing that has ever happened.

*Interviewer:* Can you tell us a couple of memories about you when you were fishing?

*Martin Fischer:* Well, I think one of my favorite memories is the day I found all those fish on my birthday. When I got back to land, I called my mom up and told her about it, and she said she had been sitting in her favorite chair in her house in Glencoe, Illinois, and she happened to look out the window at the exact time that I found the fish, and a rainbow went across her yard.

- - -